

Burning Bowl, Dec 30, 2018

Unity, as a denomination, generally proclaims it does not have any creed or rituals. This is meant to distinguish Unity from the formalized religions, caught in the concrete structures of their doctrines, required rituals and unchanging interpretations of spiritual texts. I believe the Fillmores, maybe especially Charles, intended this to keep Unity as a dynamic practice, evolving with the new awakenings in science and consciousness. I love that about Unity.

Yet, our human nature is to like some things that are familiar. We like a little ritual in our lives, whether it is the way we make tea in the morning or knowing that if there is a Unity church nearby, there should be a Burning Bowl service sometime near New Year's. Charles Fillmore doesn't give a meaning or definition of ritual in the Revealing Word, although he says "The rites and ceremonies of the priests in the tabernacle or temple represent the action of spiritual forces in developing the body." The secular, online definition of ritual focuses on an order of activities, usually religious or solemn in nature. For me, the definition of a spiritual ritual is an outward activity that corresponds to an inner process in consciousness. Many spiritual observers have noted that one challenge in religious rituals is the tendency for the action of the ritual to replace the inner process rather than reflect and be a part of the inner process. Whether it is the eucharis or communion or baptism or repeating words and phrases, if there is no tie to the inner process, the outer process loses its potency. We run the same risk in Unity with the Burning Bowl.

The purpose of the Burning Bowl is to reflect at the end of the year upon those thoughts and feelings and beliefs we no longer want to carry into this new year. What baggage would we like to set down and not bring into the journey of 2019? What boxes of dusty and maybe decaying mental tapes could we clear out of the attic of our minds and create space for the expanding consciousness of the power and strength and peace of our own divinity? We discern what we want to discard, write it on a piece of paper and literally burn it. This is the outer **ritual** for the change in consciousness we desire for the coming year. I need to clarify that this is **not** a magic ritual that replaces the inner process in consciousness. Writing something on a piece of paper and burning it does **not** replace the effort of denying error thoughts and beliefs the power to run our lives and motivate our words and actions. This ritual does not **replace** the spiritual practice of self-awareness and opening to spirit.

In actuality, if you have been attending ULV in 2018, we have been doing the inner work all year that the ritual of the Burning Bowl represents and is an integrated part of. What I want to do this morning is go back over some of the releasing work we've talked about. If you missed the work during the year; if you are new to Unity; I will try to give you enough background to process and discern what you'd like to put on the paper and let go of in the Burning Bowl. Just know that the process of letting go may continue to unravel and unfold in 2019. What makes the Burning Bowl powerful is to allow us to set a ***firm intention*** of release and return to that intention over and over as we create space for the expanding consciousness of divine power in and through us. Every time the fear, the doubt, the belief in lack and limitation appears to define our dreams and actions—every time those error thoughts come up we see them for what they are—the illusions of this temporary world. We face the limits we create and deny them power. We imagine the limiting thoughts consumed in the purifying fire of Truth and reduced to smoke that disappears. We repeat this as many times as needed to allow the light of that purifying Truth to reveal new thoughts of confidence, ways to create peace and paths to healing ourselves and the world. It is our continued practice of letting go that clears the way for our manifesting dreams in 2019. Get your pencils and papers out and we will discern what to release as we prepare for 2019.

So let's begin. Waaaay back in February and March, the youth gave us jars to put change in as we practiced becoming aware of speaking power into words unconsciously. Some of us noticed that we gave power to self-defeating ideas by speaking aloud, "I'm so dumb" or "I can't do this" or "the world is lost". We said them over and over—although hopefully, if we had accountability partners who made us put money in the jar each time we developed the self-awareness to think before we speak. Is there a self-defeating phrase or idea that you currently speak power to, and this can include cursing God, which you are willing to transform and release before you jump into a new year? We'll think about this a moment and you can write down a word or phrase if something comes to mind to let go of.

In the spring I spoke about the lessons of the muppet Kermit and "It's not easy being green". Many of us live our lives behind masks and facades because deep inside we believe that living our authentic selves is not ok. We allow the judgments and expectations of others to direct our choices rather than listening for the still small voice of our own divine wisdom.

As we pause to consider the power and freedom of living authentically as our true nature—living as love and peace and in the flow of abundance—what do we see getting in our way? Is it fear? Is it a belief in the illusion that there is not enough for everyone? Is it the error message we have gotten that **we** are not enough-flawed in some fundamental way that forever limits us? If you could write down a word or phrase that, if it were released and erased, would free you to be yourself, what would it be? Are you ready to bravely live your authentic self? That is the tricky part of the Burning Bowl. The fire cannot consume what we continue to hold onto in our minds. If we produce a replacement error thought for every one we say we let go of, we make no progress in clearing the clutter. So if you are ready to really let go, write the error message down and prepare to live in the freedom and responsibility of your authentic divine power.

In our fall faith series of Loving Everybody Always and becoming love, we explored quite a few barriers and ideas about how we are separate from one another. These are false thoughts, of course. We affirm oneness at the beginning of every service. Is that affirmation of One Power, one of our Unity rituals that has lost its tie to the inner process of realizing the practical, everyday implications of truly knowing we are one in spirit? If there really is only one power and one presence in my life and in the entire galaxy of galaxies, then I am as much one with the stuff of stars as I am one with the homeless person on the corner. It is staggering to consider. It baffles the “in the box” thinking we have been conditioned to. Life in the box lacks mystery and maybe with it awe—but it does feel more secure and certain. What elements make up the box that keeps you separated from others? Ego tells you the box of separation is needed for your safety. Spirit says your true security lies in the eternal oneness. Could you, would you, are you willing to dismantle the box of separation? When you think you might be ready, and it may not be today, write down and let go of thoughts and beliefs that separate you from others. Just a word on the paper is enough when you are firm in your intention to become love, alive and expressing in the world. So when you’re clear and ready, write down the barrier to oneness you are releasing.

Our advent series invited us to expand our prosperity consciousness in one way that might have surprised you—through forgiveness.

Prosperity is really spiritual wellbeing expressing in every nook and cranny and aspect of our lives. Prosperity is a bounty of health and loving relationships and debt free finances. It is our divine inheritance as the offspring of a generous and infinitely abundant creative Source. To claim our prosperity we participate in the flow of giving; we live our authentic purpose, we focus on goals and we forgive ourselves and others. What keeps you from tithing? Where do you withhold love and instead hold the unforgiving thoughts of anger, pain and shame? We'll talk about purpose and goals next week at the White Stone service. This week we are still working on clearing the channel within our consciousness through which divine Source pours out our good. Is there a kink in the channel through you?

Breathe into a sense of expanding prosperity in your health and relationships and wealth. We are enough and we have enough through our divine nature. We don't need this human belief that not forgiving ourselves and others can somehow benefit us or protect us from some harm. If you could let go of the pain and forgive just one person, yourself or someone else, what might be possible? It could feel like forgiving a big act or it could feel like forgiving a small pebble in your shoe that has been uncomfortable for a long time. Breathe into the freedom of forgiving. Are you ready to open the channel of good? The Divine already loves you and knows that its creation is worthy of every good thing. The infinite Source is poised to pour as soon as you open the way and open the hand you have clenched in a fist. Let go and when you are ready, write down an initial or some indicator of the forgiving practice you intend to allow to clear out space for new good in 2019.

One last review of the paper you are releasing into the purifying flame of truth. Is there anything else you are ready to release? Really ready to release? Ready to let go with an intention to face the error thought time and time again until your consciousness knows the truth at such a core level, the errors lose their roots and stop pushing up. Is there something on your heart or mind or mind of your heart that is ready to be released that we haven't touched on? Write a word or phrase to capture the intention of letting it go.

As you keep clearing, year after year, be prepared for some new error thoughts to be created because our minds are linked to infinite creativity. Yet also be prepared for knowing the truth at a core level to feel less and less awkward. Be prepared to recognize error thoughts more quickly. Be prepared to feel in your body when you are not being authentic and yes, be prepared to make the choices in alignment with the divine power and love and compassion that create harmony between your outer self and your true self—as you move towards oneness.

I invite you to come forward, one row at a time, beginning with the back row and bring your paper up to the burning bowl. As you drop off and release that which no longer serves you, pick up an angel card with a focus word for 2019. When we create the space, Spirit pours in.